

ANNUAL ARTS ISSUE

BREAKING GROUND

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Untitled, Olivia Rose DeCaria

Hello, my name is Olivia Rose DeCaria. I am 21 years old and I have Down syndrome. I am a student at Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna.

Last Summer I attended Camp Shriver at University School. The camp was great and we did many activities that were fun.

I liked the art projects the most.

When you look at my painting you see there is a girl trapped inside. She can't find the light of love and no one is there to hear her crying, screaming or yelling. She is trying to find the light of love and exit through the door of pain.

But the door is covered up with poison ivy, bricks, wood, pavement, metal, duct tape and a master lock. She needs the light of love to show her the way out.

The colors of my painting represent me and my feelings. Blue represents sadness, black represents pain and red represents my heart.

My parents are going through a divorce and it causes me to have a lot of pain. My therapist told me to try to use art to express my emotions. And that is what I tried to do. The girl in the painting is me.



Cover art: *Faces 1* by John Butts, Jr.

John Butts, Jr. is a resident of Clarksville and belongs to ReConnect Clarksville Peer Support Center. He started drawing when he was in elementary school and says drawing is very relaxing.

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Introduction BY WANDA WILLIS

Since 1995 the Council has sponsored a special issue of the *Breaking Ground* magazine that is dedicated to arts. Poetry, photography, prose and drawing/painting are typical submissions to the Arts Issue from Tennesseans with disabilities and their friends. We are proud to present the 15th Annual Arts Issue this month! If this is your first time to view and read the *Breaking Ground* Arts Issue, you are in for a stunning and inspiring experience. A well known curator from Houston, Anne Tucker, said 'All art requires courage.' I thought of that as I viewed and read the submissions from across Tennessee for this Arts Issue. I want to extend personal thanks to those who have shared their experiences through beautiful and moving art, and provide us the opportunity to connect with them using our own life experiences.

Wanda Willis is executive director of the Council on Developmental Disabilities

CONTACT INFORMATION



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Young Artists with and without Disabilities Learn to Create and Talk Together

By Coral Getino

Talk Together, 66"x71" 5-piece mural, Acrylic on Wood, 2009. Collaborative art by Jalyn Weston, Brant Cutler, Logan Thompson, Sy Bechtel and Justin Sumpter-Getino, aged 6-14, with peers Stephanie Steren-Ruta and Holly Perrin, aged 14.

A collaborative art project was created as part of a Social Skills and Art Class led by teachers Dina Ruta and Liana Hale, and sponsored by the Autism Society of America, East Tennessee Chapter (ASA-ETC). The purpose of this 14-week class was to let children with autism explore different art concepts and media, and allow for artistic expression while practicing their social skills. The teachers' philosophy that children should learn through games made for a very relaxed environment – and one that was primed for social interaction.

For many children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), art can be an alternative to non-verbal communication. Some children with ASD have exceptional artistic talent, while others have significant motor skill challenges. But the common denominator is difficulty in the area of social skills.

The art class composition was designed to address social skills. It was comprised of five children with ASD, two siblings and four typically developing peers, who helped with projects and modeled conversation. Mss. Ruta and Hale were originally contacted by ASA-ETC and passionately embraced this program, which aimed to reinforce motor skills, expand the children's interests and communication, and achieve social integration. The activities were designed to work in a structured group environment, with the final objective of displaying the framed works in an exhibit. True to the vision, the project culminated in the creation of a collaborative mural, which was on display at the Knoxville Museum of Art until the end of July.

The group met on Fridays at the Knoxville Museum of Art's Exploratory Gallery classroom. The classroom provided—with its clean walls, white tables and huge blackboard—a perfect environment for avoiding overstimulation. The hands-on pegboard art wall, with its combination of light, color and dimension, was a reward after every class, or a calm-down place when needed during the sessions.

The art activities reinforced spatial and temporal organization and encouraged motor control and spontaneous forms of expression through different creative tasks that were accomplished in small groups. Participants created two- and three-dimensional works, such as collages, mobiles and concrete geometrical figures in space. Children colored with crayons, pastels, tempera, acrylic and watered ink. Work was adapted for a child with a visual disability, and the paper cutting, gluing, painting and ink blowing provided many opportunities for sensory integration.

Employing lines and colors and exploring different paints, textures and three dimensional shapes, the children created unique designs. Combining a piece of original art from each student with autism, a mural was created. Once the design was laid out, children and peers painted their own individual creations in different sections of the mural. When the children saw the "big picture", there was a spontaneous realization that they had worked together to create a beautiful "whole".

Jalyn Weston, the youngest artist in the group, gave the mural its name, "Talk Together", noticing that the figures faced one another and seemed engaged in conversation, perfectly summarizing the purpose of the class. Week after week the group gelled and the artists grew more comfortable with each other, became friends and talked together! The experience was invaluable for the peers as well, as they recognized the many different abilities and qualities in the children with ASD.

Coral Getino is ASA-ETC past-president and mother of two children, one of them with ASD. She is a Partners in Policymaking™ graduate and former member of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. She also is very active in the Hispanic community and is the current chairperson for the HoLa Festival.

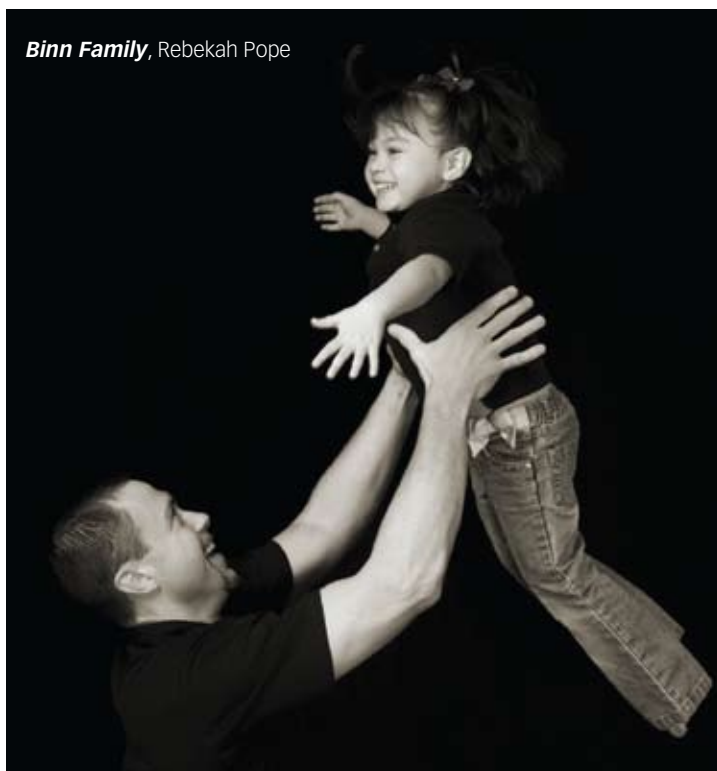


Photos by Dina Ruta

Clockwise from top: Brant Cutler; Ambrose Bechtel; Jayln Weston behind Brant Cutler; left, Justin Sumpter-Getino, right Coral Getino; left, Justin Sumpter-Getino, right, Stephanie Steren-Ruta; Logan Thompson; left, Jayln Weston, right Stephanie Steren-Ruta.



The Pond, Christopher Yancey | Master Yancey is a five-year-old with Down syndrome, who lives in Memphis.



Binn Family, Rebekah Pope

Middle Tennessee photographer, Rebekah Pope, specializes in artistic family, children, baby, newborn and maternity photography in Nashville, Brentwood, Franklin and Williamson County. This image is from an upcoming book by Ms. Pope and Nashville writer, Leisa A. Hammett, entitled, *From Heartache to Hope: Middle Tennessee Families Living with Autism*.

IN MY HEART *By Deanne Collins*

I see the earth.
The vast fields of wheat and the sun shines down on my face.

Oh, how the waters cool the earth.
The trees sing with the breeze and I follow the birds.

The wind pushes me and my spirits to moments of joy
and my feet carry the burden of my soul.

Where to go to celebrate my eternal joy?
I search for happiness.

My friends are here with me always—always
Moving to the music in my heart.

We share the space. I in mine and they in theirs and the Angels
gather around us

Come. Come. Come join me from the land, sea and sky.
Breathe with me.

Deanne Collins, Edd, director, playwright, choreographer, directs the Kidz Kompany at the Spring Hill Public Library and is author of the historical drama *SCATHE: A Civil War Incident in Spring Hill Tennessee*.

This poem was written for a group of children from The Tennessee School for the Blind who performed for the VSA arts of Tennessee showcase on April 23, 2009. It is a poem written for a dance; each child danced a solo to one of these lines.

STANDING OUTSIDE MYSELF

By Sheri Grigsby

Interested in viewing my life and person from a different angle, I walk around this house that is me; feeling the soft green grass between my toes, and smelling the sweet honeysuckle as I round the far corner of the house. I push forward through the dense foliage of my conscious mind, and climb onto a rock just below a small side window that looks into the house. It gives me a chance to see and feel things from an angle not always taken out and explored.

When looking in from this vantage point, I can feel hurt without the emotion overriding my analysis of its origin. While looking between the slits of light between the blinds, I can see my behaviors and actions, and how they impact others without the shame of that moment blocking out my realization of how to change this. As I prop my elbows on the window sill for a closer look, I can imagine just how it feels to be me; how it will feel when I am able to become who I want to be, as well as realize the gravity of who I am when I am not looking. With my chin propped on my folded hands, I am able to describe, in my mind's eye, just what impact my thoughts, actions and life choices have on the ones who love me most.

I am able to find forgiveness in this place of introspection, just outside the realm of my own person. There is no pride, anger, worry or incapability in this intrinsic refuge. There is, however, release, completion, self-reliance and a strength that comes from within, that before leaving on the journey to this place was forever locked in an unseeing, unfeeling, prideful chasm of darkness.

Standing on the rock below this clear glass, the earth doesn't seem so hard and unyielding, and the sky seems a little more obtainable. Leaning against the panes of the window, I feel as though I can taste the warmth of the sunset. The pull of the moon pulls my tide inside its soft glow with the magic of its yearning rotation.

There are no dividing walls in this place. No division of heart, mind and body. One connected, intersecting being, that is the girl and woman that is me.

Now there is a streaming illuminating flame guiding my internal dialogues to a before un-traveled road of desire, and over-all extreme gratification. A strong glaring view of life as it can be, of how it will be, when I conquer the balance of my thoughts, emotions, fear, worry, anger, happiness and joy.

Standing here now, I feel a power that has never come in all of the one-penny acrobatics done out of a desire for approval, acceptance, love or acknowledgment. There is only a warm sense of reality, that is an unreality, looking through the window of my own soul and liking what I see.

Sheri Grigsby is a Partners and Policymaking™ graduate (06-07) and at-large member of the Council on Developmental Disabilities.



Photo by Jo Ver Mulm

THE BEE HIVE A CONCRETE POEM

By Jack Ver Mulm

LOOK
AT ME AND
YOU WILL SEE. A
TRIANGLE FOR YOU
AND ME. BEES MAY USE
ME AS A HIVE. I GET VERY
FLATTERED INDEED. I NEED
TO CHANGE SHAPE FOR THIS
PAPER IS GETTING SMALL.
I WISH I COULD GROW LONG
AND TALL. BUT THIS PIECE OF
PAPER IS GETTING SMALL. I
WISH I HAD A HUGE PIECE OF
PAPER OF SOME SORT. I WANT
TO GROW LONG AND TRUE LIKE
A PYRAMID. NOW I AM LOOKING
LIKE A MONUMENT IN WASHINGTON
IT MAY BE ODD, BUT I AM PROUD
INDEED.

Jack Ver Mulm is a 12-year-old amateur beekeeper. He is an honor student, a competitive swimmer and a passionate conservationist who also happens to have autism. Master Ver Mulm lives in Murfreesboro with his parents, Dave and Jo Ver Mulm, his brother, Jared, and sister, Caroline.

A MESSAGE FROM AMANDA CASH

Hi! Many of you know me. I'm Amanda Cash and I am on the Down Syndrome Association of the Mid-South board of directors as the self-advocate for people with Down syndrome. It has been my dream to set a good example and show people just how capable we are.

I feel that I have been a self-advocate all my life. Yes, I have Down syndrome but I also have a full and exciting life. I have been with the performing arts troupe Company d for eight years. You may have seen us perform at some time.

My newest venture is being a puppeteer for "Kids on the Block". I love going to elementary schools and teaching little kids about the abilities of people with Down syndrome through my puppet skits. The earlier that we can teach people about disabilities the better this world will be for people like me and others.

By being a part of Company d and Kids on the Block, I have the opportunity to give Down syndrome a face, a name and recognition in the

community. Through my commitment to Company d and Kids on the Block I have reached tens of thousands of people over the years. Not only do I strive to give hope to new parents that their child does have a bright future, but I also make a statement to the public that I am talented, happy and capable of sending my message of inclusion to the world.

I have been to Nashville on several occasions and spoken with state senators and representatives about the needs of people with Down syndrome and other disabilities to be included in all areas of life. In February, I met with Representative John DeBerry about the restrictions that are placed on me and others with disabilities who are trying to seek a higher education. Representative DeBerry has presented a bill that requires schools to issue an "Occupational Diploma", which would be accepted by vocational schools so that we can further our education and become employed in professions that we are trained to excel in and benefit society.

There are so many things that I and others with Down syndrome can do. When people hear Down syndrome, instead of a pitiful or confused look, I want them to have a smile of acceptance and understanding, just like I do. I hope that my efforts will make it easier for others with Down syndrome to be accepted and understood.

Thank you for your time.

Bless you all!

Amanda Cash

Ms. Cash performed with Les Passes Kids on the Block during the Fall 2007, Winter 2008, Fall 2008 and Winter 2009 semesters to various schools, public and private, in Memphis/Shelby County. She will be participating in more in-service training this August, and will begin performing at the schools again in September.

Photo by Peter Barton



THE LES PASSEES KIDS ON THE BLOCK PUPPETS SPREAD AWARENESS

By Libbee Clifford, Director

Les Passees Kids on the Block is a puppet education program that addresses issues that students face in their everyday lives. We partnered with the Down Syndrome Association of the Mid-South (DSAM) and have included the script on Down syndrome in our Self Esteem Program. In that program, our very large and lively puppets show students that we are all the same inside, no matter how different we are on the outside or in the way we learn. We also do programs on Alternatives to Violence and Gang Membership; NO Bullying; Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Prevention; Safety; and Learning and Physical Differences.

Amanda Cash is our Self-Advocate Puppeteer and presents Ellen Jane Peterson, the puppet with Down syndrome. Amanda has been puppeteering for two years and we look forward to her being with us as we move forward. We do not ever use the term disability—Amanda is our puppeteer with Different Abilities. She is our first and only Self-Advocate Puppeteer, and does a great job with her presentation of Ellen Jane and relating to the students in the audience.

Les Passees Kids on the Block is sponsored by Les Passees, Inc., one of the oldest women's volunteer organizations in Memphis. Les Passees supports LPKOB and the Harwood Center through annual fundraising events.



Photo by Steven Polley

Les Passes had an old Ellen Jane Peterson puppet and at one of the first training sessions, Amanda asked the instructor, "What is wrong with Ellen Jane?" and the instructor said, "Well, Amanda, she has Down syndrome." Amanda replied, "No, I know that — she doesn't have any shoulders or knees." Everyone cracked up laughing.

Needless to say, Amanda gave a presentation to the Bartlett Civitan Club telling them of the need for a new Ellen Jane. They granted funds to DSAM and purchased Amanda a brand new Ellen Jane that cost \$850. Amanda was thrilled. This one has knees and shoulders.

— **Donna Cash, Amanda's mom**

**The Kids
on the Block**



“NO MATTER WHAT”

By *L. Kim Battle*

“Buttons,” Tommy’s mom said as she peeked in the door. “Are you ready?” He shrugged his shoulders as if he wasn’t sure. She always called him “Buttons” when he was feeling sad or had a bad day. But today was different because he was going to the hospital.

“Yeah, I guess,” he said. She nodded as if she was saying “it’s o.k.”

Tommy couldn’t believe he was finally going to the hospital. It had been months since he’d seen his friend Caleb. In fact, he hadn’t seen him since he told the class he was sick with cancer and wouldn’t be able to come back to school. “Beep, beep.” Tommy’s mom was waiting for him in the car. “I guess I’m ready,” he said to himself.

As Tommy got into the car, he remembered the times when he and Caleb hung out either at school or each other’s home watching TV, playing video games or eating, which was Caleb’s favorite. He also remembered the promise they made, which was to be best friends until the end. It was at this time that they gave each other secret names. His was “Tom Cat” and Caleb’s was “C-Man”.

When they pulled into the hospital parking lot, Tommy’s stomach started turning and hurting. He was nervous because he didn’t know what to expect or say to Caleb when he saw him. Tommy grabbed his mom’s hand, something he hadn’t done in years, as they walked into the hospital. But when he walked in, he couldn’t believe how big and nice it was. The walls were colorful and bright and each seating area had a theme, such as a forest, pirate ship and a castle. Once they reached the floor where Caleb was, his nurse explained to Tommy that Caleb was doing very well and is able to move around, but he will get tired fast. “He has lost a lot of weight and hair, so he may look a little different,” she said, and then she directed Tommy to Caleb’s room. He let go of his mom’s hand and slowly started toward room 7G.

Tommy pushed the door open and slowly walked in. The walls were painted blue with rockets, planets and astronauts all around. Caleb was lying in the bed playing one of the many games he received as a gift. “I forgot to bring something,” he thought.

As Tommy stood in the doorway, Caleb saw him. The grin on his face said it all, he missed his best friend.

“Bout time,” Caleb said. “Come over and sit down. I’ve so much to tell you.”

“He sounds like Caleb but he’s smaller and his head is bald,” were Tommy’s thoughts.

“Why are you looking at me like that? I’m still me,” Caleb said as he put his game away. He had tubes and machines all around with one in his arm making Tommy afraid to go near him.

“Come over and sit on my bed ‘cause I want to show you something.”

Tommy walked slowly to Caleb’s bed and gently sat down.

“Watch this,” Caleb said as he pushed a button on the remote. All of a sudden, the bed started to move as if someone was making it shake. Then he pushed another button and the bed started moving up and down. The boys looked at each other and at the same time they said “Cool.” Afterward, Tommy and Caleb talked about school and how Caleb only had to study when he felt good. They also talked about the new games that were coming out and, of course, food. Though Caleb didn’t have much of an appetite, he still loved to talk about food.

“O.k. guys, just a few more minutes,” the nurse said as she came in to check Caleb’s temperature.

“Aw, man,” Caleb said, “we were just starting to have fun.”

Tommy didn’t say anything, but wondered what it was like being sick. “How does it feel?” Tommy asked. Caleb looked at Tommy as if he were from another planet. But actually, he didn’t know how to answer because it was indescribable.

“Well,” he started explaining, “it’s like having the worst flu ever but never getting over it.” There was a silence that seemed to last forever. “I have a lot of pain and I don’t feel like eating most of the time,” he continued, “but the hardest part is that everyone treats me like I’m different.”

“How?” Tommy asked.

“Well, they don’t want to touch me, come by or call. And when they do it’s as if they’re not themselves. I was Caleb before I got sick and I’m the same Caleb now,” he said with tears coming to his eyes. “I want my friends to treat me the same way as they did before this happened.”

Tommy saw that Caleb was very upset so he decided to tell him the truth. “I was really nervous before I came in because I didn’t know what to expect, but now I see it’s o.k., I promise you that I will be back.”

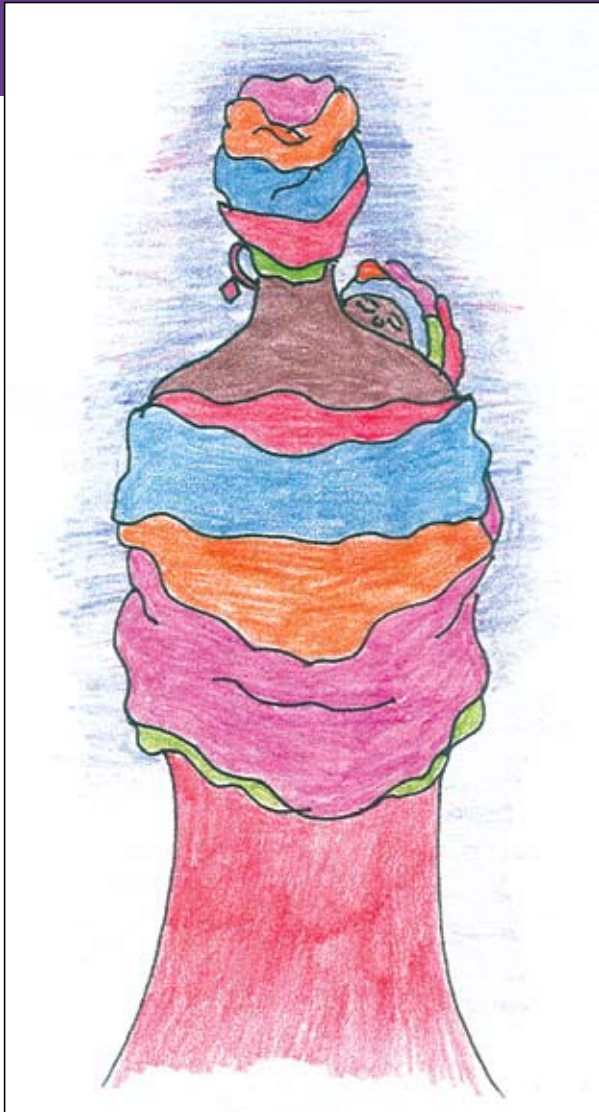
Caleb’s eyes lit up like a 4th of July fireworks show. He was so happy that he began planning what they would do the next time.

“Time’s up,” the nurse said when she popped her head in the room.

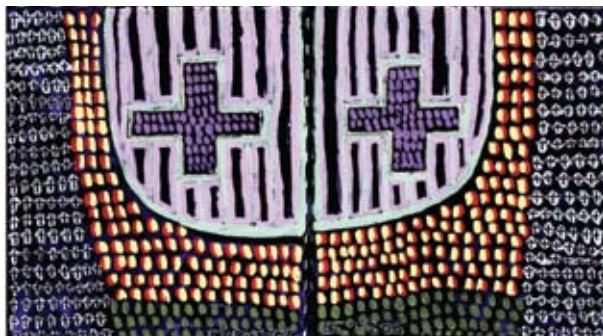
Tommy stood up, and as he walked toward the door Caleb called out, “When are you coming back Tom Cat?” When he heard his secret name being said by his best friend, he was happy.

“Next week C-Man,” he said. But before he took another step he said, “C-Man, I’m your friend no matter what.”

La Tanya Kim Battle, a native Nashvillian, is an inspiring writer who loves to read and meet people. Her wish is to one day publish her many written books.



Mother and Child, La Tanya Kim Battle



Untitled 1, Ellen J. Zahorec

Ellen J. Zahorec lives in Hixson and experiences a severe depressive disorder. Ms. Zahorec received an MFA from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and a BFA from Kent State University. Her artwork is centered on religious themes in an effort to heal herself and others.

BEAUTY

The beauty of this world
is to see what life really means,
to understand that today is today, and tomorrow is a blessing.

The beauty of life
is to see the future, to cherish what is given,
and to appreciate the things that mean the most.

The beauty of love
is to love yourself, and to share the love with people who love you.

The beauty of peace
is to relax, to breathe, to be able to control yourself physically, mentally
and emotionally.

The beauty of joy
is to be able to explore what it means to smile, to laugh, and to play.

The beauty of dreams
is to fantasize the possible,
to be able to reach, touch, hold, and to believe it.

The beauty of trust
is to thank people who have shown you the real truth of discovery,
to be able to understand that life is still beautiful,
and to be able to use that guide of honesty.

The beauty of happiness
is to seize the moment, to face the situation head on,
to understand there is a miracle, to believe there is hope,
and to protect your surroundings with inspirational people that I call a
friend and a hero.

Breka Moore

Breka Moore is a 2001 Youth Leadership Forum graduate who lives in Milan. "The poem I wrote was for someone who helped me discover the real purpose of life."

THE CREATIVE ARTS PROJECT

By Dawn Hale

The artists of the Creative Arts Project are unique. You may not have seen them at the Saturday Night Gallery Crawl in the downtown Nashville galleries. But you *can* see them creating art in their peer support centers and classrooms, and doing it for a reason that sets them apart from some artists. They create art because of the way it makes them feel inside. As one of the artists said, "creating art makes me feel good and gives me hope for the future."

You see, all of the people who participate in the Creative Arts Project are unique individuals, individuals who also have a common, multi-colored thread running through them. They are all in mental health or substance use recovery, and some also have developmental disabilities. Several had never picked up a paint brush or drawing pencil or had an art lesson of any kind before learning of the project, yet they create beautiful works of art that often free them from their emotional disabilities.

The Creative Arts Project is sponsored by the Middle Tennessee Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition in Nashville, and includes artists from 14 Middle Tennessee counties. The project began in 2004 as a way to raise awareness about mental health recovery and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and substance use disorders. Grant monies and partnerships from both public and private sectors make the art classes possible, with free art supplies and gallery-style framing that cause these artists to grin with pride.



Thank You, Donald McFarland

Donald McFarland is a resident of Woodlawn and is a member of ReConnect Clarksville Peer Support Center. He likes to paint with acrylics on canvas and often pictures widely acclaimed individuals. *Thank You* gives appreciation to the father of us all. Mr. McFarland says, "Creating art helps me to express myself."

Then there are the exhibits! The Nashville community has opened its arms to these artists and their fine work. Exhibits have been held at the Parthenon, the Tennessee Performing Arts Center, The Tennessee Art League, the Tennessee State University Main Campus, Bordeaux Library, Hermitage Library, Downtown Presbyterian Church and The Vanderbilt Clinic at 100 Oaks, just to name a few.

The Coalition also provides opening receptions for the artists each year. Often, this becomes a time when artists can talk about creating their art. In addition, at every exhibit a "titleblock" is placed next to each work listing the creator's name and artwork title. It also contains a statement from the artist that helps to describe how creating art makes them feel.

"Creating art helps me take my mind off things. Art is beautiful."

"Creating art is a time of leisure. A time to clear my mind of everything and just enjoy putting things I see on paper for others to see and hopefully enjoy."

"Art gives meaning and purpose to my life."

"Creating art gets rid of my depression because I have to make my drawings come to life. I can go any place in the world through my art work."

The Creative Arts Project is definitely changing the way we view art and its creators. It *is* making a difference in lives. And soon, very soon, these artists *will* be next to you at the Gallery Crawl, enjoying the impact their art is making on Nashville's arts enthusiasts, advocates and collectors.

For more information on how you can become involved with the Creative Arts Project, please contact the Middle Tennessee Mental Health & Substance Abuse Coalition at 615-594-4642 or e-mail MTMHSAC@yahoo.com.

Dawn Hale is the Creative Arts Project Assistant



The Red Cliff, Kathy Tupper

Kathy Tupper is a resident of Nashville. She had seven years experience as an Advertising Art Director and 16 years as a Commercial Artist for the Metro Government. Her experiences in freelancing also include community art murals and business shows. *Radnor Reverie* to her is "Peacefully spiritual in visual memories of nature."



Fort Worth Bus, Chris Dennis

Mr. Dennis lives in Smyrna and is a photography student at Nossi College of Art in Goodlettsville. He is 23 years old and a 2003 graduate of the Tennessee Youth Leadership Forum. He has Attention Defici Disorder and learning disabilities. He intends to work for National Geographic magazine to travel the world and take photographs.

MY CHILD

by Rachel Noles

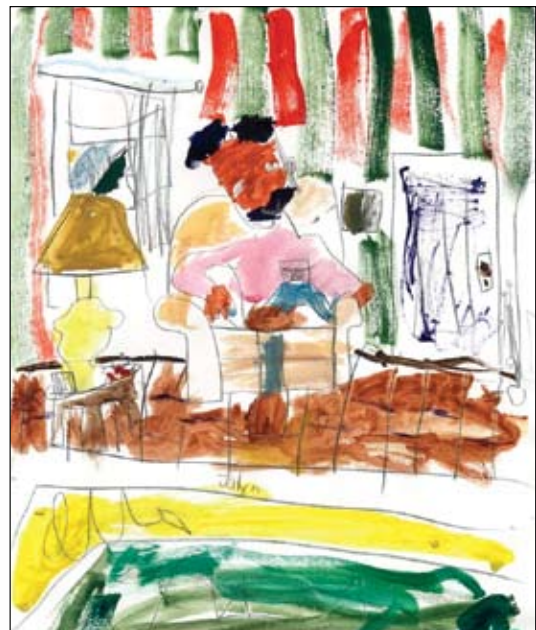
So many days, I dont know where you are
Vacant stare, when I ask how you feel
Blank expression masks what's in your head
But I dont dwell
I embrace each moment
waiting for the next time
Our spirits touch and I know we understand each other
The love so strong in my heart for you
God, I pray is strong enough
I believe when you reach for my hand
In rare moments of clarity
You're trying to tell me
Love is enough to wash away
Unintentional mistakes.
Love is enough to hold on to
To forgive the lack of patience;
my own and other people's ignorance
I believe if you could express
You'd tell me Mommy its ok
Confusion overwhelming is forgiveable engulfed
in your love
So I will hold you through your storms
I will reach for you when you allow
and back away when you need to shut down
And I will hold your hand through it all
til one day, you are healed or I understand
I will hold to those rare moments
when our spirits touch
I will keep them tucked away
for those more trying days
and cherish them and you, my special prize
forever are my light

Rachel Noles is the mother of a seven-year-old boy diagnosed with autism at the age of four. "Although I have fought through some dark times, I have found light in this journey and am hoping to find ways to help others through as well."



Lady, LeAnn Wilson

Lee Ann Wilson lives in Clarksville. She has interests in painting, ceramics and other art forms. She is a member of ReConnect Clarksville Peer Support Center. *Lady* was featured on the bookmarks created for Mental Illness Awareness Week 2008 and distributed widely in public libraries. Ms. Wilson says, "...art is a way of expressing myself and a way of not worrying about my troubles."



Grandpa in Chair, Jalyn Weston

Jalyn Weston is a six-year-old boy diagnosed with high functioning autism at age four. He attends Sweetwater Primary School, where he is an honor student and an accelerated reader. Master Weston participated in the Social Skills and Art Class this year (see article on page 4).



INTERACT CHILDREN'S THEATRE FOR THE DEAF

By Taylor Rumsey

InterAct Children's Theatre for the Deaf is a non-profit theatre company that brings children's literature to life on stage, using spoken English and American Sign Language simultaneously. The company aims to expose children who are deaf or hard of hearing to literature and theatre, while also bridging the gap between the hearing and deaf communities.

In order to be fully accessible to both hearing and deaf audiences, there are both speaking and deaf actors, along with professional sign language interpreters. There are times when the interpreters function strictly as shadows for both hearing and deaf actors, and other times when the interpreters are characters within the play. After a recent performance, an administrator for Tennessee School for the Deaf (TSD) said, "The actors made a classic children's story . . . come alive. It was the first time that many of our students saw a play with both hearing and deaf actors. It was a completely accessible play for them."

Due to cultural and language differences, the use of shadow interpreters may not always be enough to guarantee the children's total understanding of the performances. Therefore, as part of InterAct's commitment to support and encourage literacy, as well as developing an appreciation for theatrical performances, an educational outreach packet is developed and provided for each

school performance. These packets include historical information about the story, setting, time period, various characters and specific vocabulary that might not be familiar to children today, as well as general information about sign language.

The co-founding members of InterAct are Julie Danielson, Carol LaCava and Teressa Gregory. After many years of working as professional sign language interpreters in the community and within the educational system — K-12 and postsecondary — as well as individually being committed to making the performing arts accessible, they came together to form InterAct. Previously they worked with two Knoxville-based theatre companies, the Actors' Co-op and The Tennessee Stage Company. They are eternally grateful to the directors of both of these companies for their willingness to incorporate shadow interpreters within their productions. After working with these companies, and after additional training and research, they were inspired to form their own company with the desire to provide fully accessible theatrical productions for the students at the Tennessee School for the Deaf in Knoxville.

InterAct performs a Spring and Fall show every year, and has provided acting workshops for TSD's annual Family Learning Weekend. Most recently, the ensemble staged a play written by Lane Roisley called *The Commedia Robin Hood*, which was performed at the Palace

Theatre in Maryville, the Knoxville Museum of Art, the Tennessee School for the Deaf, and various elementary schools within Knox County as well as several surrounding counties.

The current InterAct ensemble members are Tammy Cate, Laura Champagney, James Harrison, Mark Hamrick, Robin Hamrick, Kim Hinchey and Missey Wright. As a group, they work together to bring to life plays based on classics such as *The Jungle Book*, *Pinocchio*, *Robin Hood*, *The Princess and the Pea* and *Charlotte's Web*.

This group is dedicated to one of InterAct's core values, which is to be inclusive and supportive of individuals regardless of their disability. They specifically encourage individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing to join InterAct. Over the years, members of the deaf community have been involved at all levels of the company. Regardless of ability or background experience, each individual who has worked with InterAct has shared that they have grown as professionals and have a newfound awareness for making the theatre accessible for individuals who use sign language to communicate.

InterAct is always appreciative of support and assistance from the community. Please see their Web site <http://www.discoveret.org> for upcoming auditions, performance dates, as well as information for making tax-deductible donations.

Taylor Rumsey is a Senior in English at the University of Tennessee and is a student employee in the Office of Disability Services.



Photos by Terry Headrick

One Woman's Rural Road

By David S. Pointer

IN HONOR OF MRS. VIRGINIA FOSTER
IN MEMORIAM

In 1973, I met the widowed Elephant woman:

She had swollen purple lollipop fingers
soothing her children's daily lives

She had happy clacker-style clapping hands
when kids played housing project baseball

with house fire hot singles and homeruns
with crowdlessness overcome by her encouragement

In 1991, I learned she had earned perfect
high school attendance (1948-1952)

and that a silver-plated plaque (retroactive)
commemorated this iconic event from school

Look, I didn't bring you here to remember the
fine glow on my grandmother's Mason jars

What had those hallway years been for her?

(Maybe) like a horror movie's
hospitality committee
her classmates cometh?

(Maybe) Down gauntlets of goodwill she goes?
Four years club-footsteppingly faster til
Down the hazing aisles to a diploma?

My known knowledge is wrapped and
refrigerated in the mind's morgue of memory

My unknown knowledge about Mrs. Foster's
four years is nil—maybe, maybe she had
learned to circumnavigate the non-violence
like the blue heron at Stones River rising

one beautiful wing beat at a time, lifting
luminous, still low over the water lilies

David S. Pointer lives in Murfreesboro with his two daughters. He has a new collection of poems entitled "Camelot Kid's Triggertopia" from alt-current.com. He has written on disability themes for many years.

SWEET AND SOUR

The world is made of sweet and sour candy.
Sometimes it's hard to fit in the mix
But if you can find the tic in your tac
Among all the gummy worms
Well you will have all the lollypops
You could ever dream of
Because candy is for everyone
Young and old it does not discriminate
You can pick from thousands of flavors
And eat until you're content
I love candy I must confess
I love the sweet and sour power of heavenly goodness
It invades my mouth like a big mouthed fish
Making me hunt for every sweet and sour candy dish.

Jessica Lawhorn

Jessica Lawhorn is 32 years old and a graduate of the 04-05 Partners class. She also graduated from the University of Tennessee with a degree in political science.

48 HOUR TORNADO WARNING

Brian McHan

On the morning of April 20, 2019, the citizens of Wagner, Oklahoma, awoke with a shock as tornado sirens wailed, and police went door to door telling people to evacuate. The sky was clear and storms were not predicted for two days.

Yellow police "Danger" tape was strung out over a half-mile wide, 20-mile long path. Outside that area were police, government officials, SKYWARN storm spotters, storm chasers, and a lone woman in a wheelchair.

The woman was Sandra Thompson, who had Lou Gehrig's Disease. Her body below her neck was paralyzed, but her mind was as sharp as a tack. She had invented a computer program that theoretically could predict the path and damage of a tornado 48 hours in advance.

Soon the evacuation was complete and the first test began. As predicted, at 4:30 pm, a tornado touched down at the exact spot, and caused almost the exact damage she predicted. The lone exception was a small tree branch that snapped 10 feet away from the predicted path of the tornado. As she was wheeled away, her automated voice said, "Oh well! Back to the drawing board."

Brian McHan is a 2002 Partners Graduate and a person dealing with schizophrenia. His short story is about a different disability and is dedicated to Stephen Hawkins.

CHRISTMAS 2007 *By Deb Clark*

Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way ...
I just couldn't get away from it. Stores having Christmas items displayed in August. It starts earlier and earlier each year. I am one of those people who just doesn't like Christmas very much.

Last year, it was coming at me like a runaway train. I had no tree, no decorations of any kind. I knew that I needed to do something for Jesse. He loves Christmas. Even though he's 28, he acts like a 10 year old at this time of year.

Jesse is developmentally delayed, but wise beyond his years. I have bipolar and holidays

really do mess me up. I was fretting because I had no decorations up for Jesse, no matter what I wanted. I had to do something. Time was running out.

One night I came home from work and had the surprise of my life. Our entertainment center had Santa Clauses taped across it. There were snow globes, a nutcracker, a snowman, an angel and an Emmett Kelly Jr. clown figurine holding presents.

I was so shocked!! Christmas had made it to the Clark house. Jesse had done everything by himself. He had cut the Santas from Coke boxes, and he has to struggle to use scissors.

There were eight of them. He was so proud! I was touched deeply. He said, "I did this for you Mom because I know you have been feeling bad. I wanted to surprise you."

He certainly did surprise me. I was in tears. We just celebrated the 4th of July, but there were no patriotic displays at our house. You know why?

I haven't taken Christmas down yet!!!

Deb Clark lives in Nolensville with husband Willie and son Jesse. All three work at Franklin Lanes where Jesse is a valued employee.

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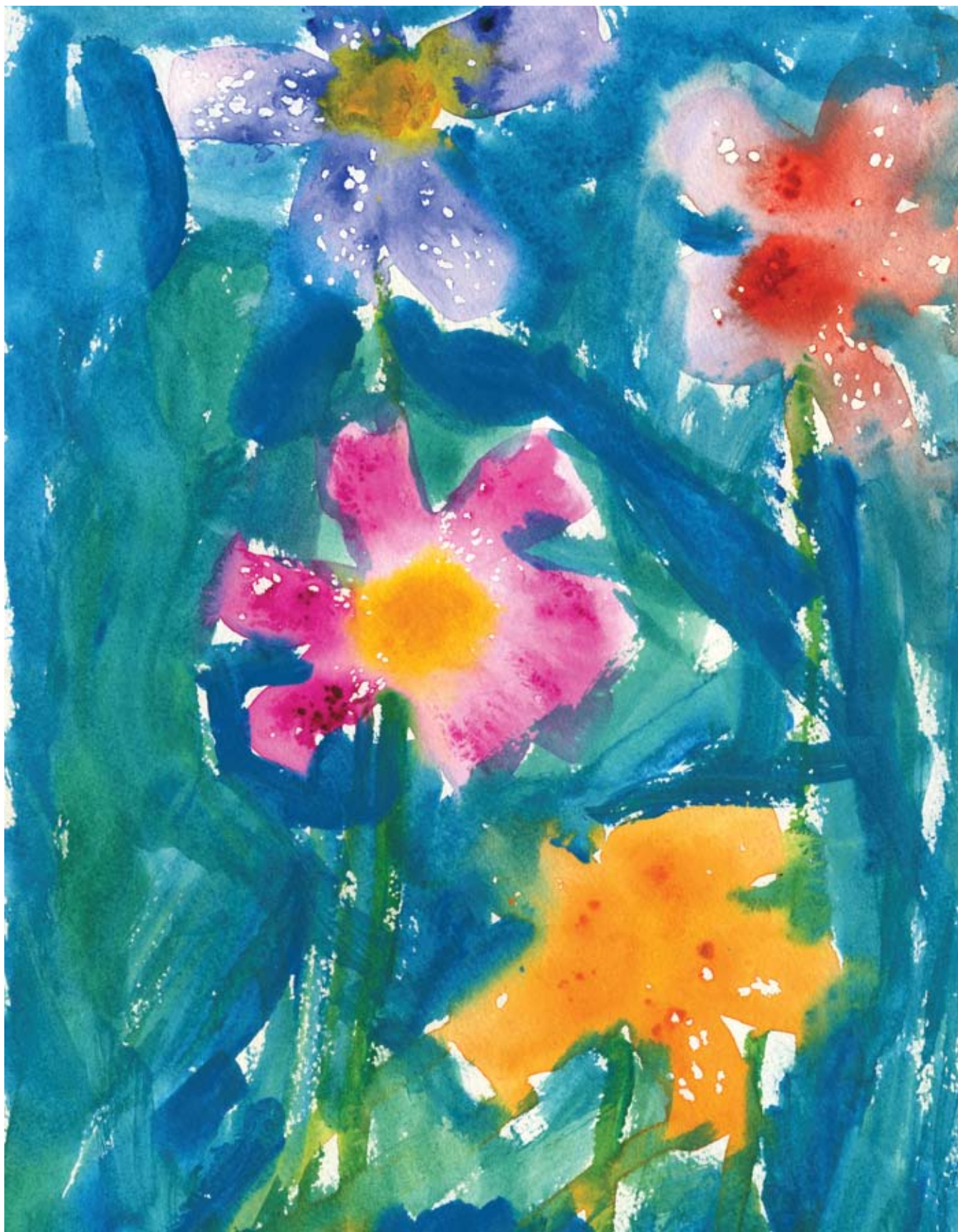
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Colorful Flowers, Gillian Lynette

Clara Gillian Lynette is a creative, funny, eight-year-old girl on the autism spectrum who lives in Brentwood. She paints and draws extensively, and her thoughts and emotions are often reflected in her work. She particularly loves music, dancing and, of course, flowers.

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Staying Strong in Recovery, Ron Bass

Ron Bass is a resident of Murfreesboro and belongs to Our Place Peer Support Center. He chose the bottom of a small wooden box for his drawing, *Staying Strong in Recovery*. He says, "Creating art helped me to think about what art really does for my recovery."